

## Day of Solidarity with the Cuban People

On May 21 we will celebrate the courage and determination of the Cuban people as they seek their freedom and voice in establishing a democratic future for their country. On this day, in the United States and elsewhere, we will commemorate a Day of Solidarity with the Cuban People.

We will call for the release of all Cuban political prisoners and repeal of all measures that allow the Cuban government to arrest citizens for carrying out acts of peaceful dissent. Cubans need to know that they have international support in their struggle for freedom and human rights, as the people in Central Europe once did.

There has been much talk in the media about the recent changes that have been announced in Cuba. Yes, Raul Castro has replaced his brother in some of his positions of authority, but this is a process in which Cuba's citizens had no say. And yes, Cubans can now buy cell phones and microwave ovens and stay in five star hotels. While Cubans may welcome such changes, they are no doubt hoping for much more. With the average monthly wage in Cuba at less than \$20, these items are still largely out of reach and won't let Cubans do what citizens in other countries in the Americas are doing: seizing the opportunity provided by open societies and open markets.

The sad fact is that Cuba's citizens still live in a repressive state, as they have for almost half a century. Last December, Cuban authorities stormed a Catholic church, tear-gassed parishioners, and dragged 18 worshipers out. A Catholic official called the episode, "the worst attack against a church in 45 years." And just a few weeks ago, the "Ladies in White," who march peacefully each Sunday on behalf of freedom for their unjustly imprisoned loved ones, were beaten and dragged away from the "Plaza of the Revolution" when they sought to deliver a petition to their government asking for the release of political prisoners. Is this change?

So how will we know when an enduring process of democratic change is underway on the island? We will know there is a new Cuba when Cubans have the freedom to organize, assemble, and speak their minds. We will know there is a new Cuba when a free and independent press has the power to operate without censors. We will know there is a new Cuba when the Cuban government allows Cubans to open their own businesses and improve the economic well-being of their families. Above all, we will know there is at least a start towards a new Cuba when the regime releases its political prisoners and engages the Cuban people in an open and comprehensive dialogue about the future of their country.

Solidarity with the Cuban people means supporting their struggle to obtain all the freedoms enumerated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, as well as those in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Cuba recently signed the latter agreement, but when will the government's actions comport with their commitments?

As any Cuban political prisoner can attest, the Cuban state hasn't implemented the provision that says: "No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment." Indeed, Cubans have been arrested and foreigners expelled for handing out copies of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights itself.

On May 21st the United States Government will join in solidarity with the Cuban people, particularly the prisoners of conscience on the island who remain behind bars. We hope you, too, will mark May 21st with a special observance in honor of the people of Cuba who continue to fight for the right to be free.